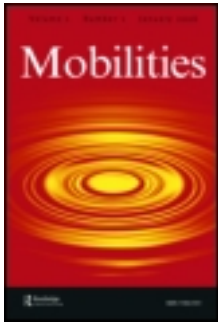


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Publisher: Routledge

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## Mobilities

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rmob20>

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Published online: 17 Mar 2014.

To cite this article: Sven Kesselring (2014): Corporate Mobilities Regimes. Mobility, Power and the Socio-geographical Structurations of Mobile Work, *Mobilities*, DOI: [10.1080/17450101.2014.887249](https://doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2014.887249)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17450101.2014.887249>

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# Corporate Mobilities Regimes. Mobility, Power and the Socio-geographical Structurations of Mobile Work

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**ABSTRACT** *This article introduces the concept of mobility regimes and points out three discursive dimensions: the normalization, rationalization and time-space-compression of mobility. It concentrates on corporate mobility, business travel and mobile work, and gives a focused overview on current developments in research. Sociology has largely neglected the topic of spatial mobility. Dealings with distance and travel, however, are driving forces for the modernization of modern societies. Economic activity is based on mobility and companies deploy sophisticated mobility regimes to be present in markets. The increase in mobile work brings new issues centre stage such as the control of mobile workers, social cohesion and the spatial complexity of corporate activities. The author theorizes mobile work and business travel as signifiers for social change in the organization of work. He presents theoretical reflections based on empirical work conducted among mobile workers in the IT, mechanical and the chemical industries.*

**KEY WORDS:** Mobility, Mobile risk society, Sociology of work, Mobility regimes, Space, Ambivalence, Power, Control, Discipline, Blurring of boundaries

## 1. Introduction

For many decades, Sociology in general neglected spatial mobility. Today, though, there is a broad literature on ‘multiple mobilities’ (Urry 2000, 1), including daily spatial movements and mobility. In the course of this development, work-related research has started to politicize and investigate the various regional, national and global spatial mobilities of employees, goods, resources and workforces (Welch and Worm 2006; Beaverstock et al. 2010a; Hislop 2013). It sounds like a truism but nevertheless economies and societies are only possible due to circulation; only movement can eradicate immediate spatial constraints. Spatial mobility is an essential social practice that connects and separates people and that entails much more than just simple translocation (Schivelbusch 1979; Cresswell 2006; Lyons, Jain, and Holley 2007). Globalization and the industrialization of time and space depend on the

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physical mobility of humans, resources, workforces and knowledge. Even in the age of the Internet, community without physical interaction is only partially possible (Boden and Molotch 1994; Urry 2002). In contrast to mobility, communication, the second vital practice of the *vergemeinschaftung* of individuals, is deeply rooted within Sociology's canon. Thus, the topic is well developed and established in theory and practice (cf. e.g. Habermas 1983–84; Luhmann 1989). A sociology of mobility as a broad programme of social theory is only now developing gradually, not least because of the strong impulses from the 'new mobilities paradigm' (Sheller and Urry 2006). Since the 1990s, a body of literature inspired by theoretical papers on tourism has been developing, turning mobility into a vital sociological topic (cf. Lash and Urry 1994; Urry 2000; Kaufmann 2002; Canzler, Kaufmann, and Kesselring 2008). The programme's objective is the analysis of mobility as a basic principle of modern societies and as specific dimension of the second modernity (Bonß and Kesselring 2001; Kellerman 2006; Urry 2007; Kesselring 2008b).

This paper sketches a thematically focused approach to the field of research in question. The mobilization of working environments is seen as central dimension of modernization as the organization of work structures all aspects of modern life (cf. Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen 2006b; Lassen 2009). Mobile work is in this case no longer a fringe phenomenon only pertaining to field staff or sales managers, truck drivers or service technicians. Already in 2007, almost 50% of the European working population had a job that was 'potentially mobile' (Hess 2007, 17). Although 'mobile work' is not recorded specifically by the official statistics, there are an increasing number of national attempts to provide reliable data. The so-called DGB-Index Gute Arbeit, e.g., an index for socially sustainable work provided by the German trade unions, offers a first approach:

In 2008, 37% of the interviewees stated that they were working to various extents in changing locations. This number shows that mobile work is not a fringe phenomenon but increasingly controls our working environment. (Brandt 2010, 9)<sup>1</sup>

The few existing prognoses on this topic assume that one is dealing with a new type of work. The still most quoted study from 2007, on behalf of CISCO Systems, says that

within two years there will be 878 million mobile workers worldwide and 99 million in Europe linked to their corporate headquarters by personal digital assistants, notebook PCs and mobile phones. This population represents more than a quarter of the global workforce and is a sharp increase from the 650 million global mobile worker population in 2004. (Pearn Kandola 2007, 8)

Unlike the definition of mobile work used in the quotation which is based on the so-called Electronic Commerce and Telework Trends (ECaTT)-norm,<sup>2</sup> mobile work is in the following not defined solely by online data transfer. Rather, mobile work generally contains activities in which 20% of the working time is spent away from the work place and from home and in which business trips play an important role. From this point of view, mobile work appears as a phenomenon relevant to an increasing number of occupations.

The restriction to mobile teleworking that dominates the discourse on mobile work (cf. e.g. Hislop 2008) is given up because it unnecessarily narrows down the phenomenon. Although the definition used builds on the ECaTT-norm (as regards working hours and time spent away from home), it also includes offline workers such as service technicians, mechanics or sales persons who travel within a networked company without transferring data. From this point of view, mobile work is widely spread, existing in almost all sectors and industries, as well as increasingly in activities that originally were stationary.

At the moment, it is impossible to pinpoint an exact number of mobile workers, both nationally and internationally. Presumably, it is considerably higher than the assumed potential of a quarter of the global workforce as this estimate uses the ECaTT-norm. There are many mobile jobs that do without mobile devices but are highly mobile.

The physical and social mobility of a company determines its economic efficiency and productivity. A company is only stable if it is in constant exchange with its environments. Money, labour, knowledge, ideas, raw materials, energy, goods and waste have to circulate. If those cycles collapsed and the social, spatial and cultural movements stagnated, production would cease. No innovation and no transport would happen, and the business's survival would be at risk. Therefore, mobile work is just a segment of a company's overall mobility. Travel, however, is the basis for all economic activities and it establishes and stabilizes the tight social and communicative networks a company needs to be successful.

Sociology has been ignoring this elementary relevance for an astonishingly long time. Apart from the new mobilities paradigm, traffic had been relinquished to geography and transportation research. Neither did the Sociology of work deal with mobility as basis for interaction, even though companies' profiles and the security of markets depend on the employees' mobility. A number of authors ascertain the same for research on human resource management, where it is even more surprisingly:

This is somewhat curious, given that international travel remains the heart of international business. The international business traveller is one for whom business travel is an essential component of their work: for example international sales staff whose jobs comprise a heavy component of international travel. Where this group is referred to, they are popularly termed 'road warriors', 'globetrotters' or 'frequent fliers'. These people are not relocated, so they do not come under the umbrella of 'international assignee' or 'expatriate'. (Welch and Worm 2006, 284)

Business travellers are the innovative potential that collects and relays information between company and outside world. They are all but a mobile 'early warning system' analysing and documenting changes; they collect data, phenomena and information, and due to their physical experiences of places, situations and productions enable companies to keep in touch with their institutional environments. In an economic environment in which the ability to set up stable and productive networks is crucial to the market success, the relevance of mobility increases as well. Although many activities can be handled remotely and discussions can largely be conducted via telephone, Internet or video conferences, face-to-face interaction remains unavoidable as soon as problems occur or clients and associates need to be

convinced and motivated. Likewise, the development of new markets cannot be based solely on statistical data mining or the Internet.

Tsing (2009) takes up on this by talking about the material structure of the ‘supply chain capitalism’. She demonstrates how social inequality is constituted along the mobility regimes of multinational companies. Thus, she productively utilizes the physical mobilities of labour, resources, products and services and determines that the network society is not only constituted in virtual space. The ‘space of flows’ (Castells 1996) materializes by travel and transportation routes between urban centres of power as well as communication links (Taylor 2004; Derudder, van Nuffel, and Witlox 2009). For

travellers form strands in the web linking the world’s cities. Corporate emissaries, government trade and commerce representatives and independent entrepreneurs (...) move among cities, greasing the wheels of production, finance or commerce through face-to-face contact. (Smith and Timberlake 1995, 296)

These spatial movements represent social power relations, which is why the social structuring of mobilities is referred to as mobility regime. For the decision on which conditions, how often and how long travel takes place, who maintains which contacts and who is when and where present is ultimately a question of power and dominance. Corporate mobility regimes control the set-up and maintenance of social ties and therefore the geography of the corporate dominion. One hypothesis is therefore that the realm of corporate power and influence reaches as far as the mobile workers go.

The term ‘corporate mobilities regime’ (Kesselring and Vogl 2010) emphasizes that mobility is a social practice that enables companies to permanently stabilize their social ties. In the following, it will be shown that mobility’s increased importance coincides with its ‘normalization’ in daily corporate routine.

And yet, this progress is only partially explained by the fact that ‘since the turn of the millennium, spending on global business travel has grown at an annual rate of 4.5%’ (Global Business Travellers Associations 2012, cited in Sabathié 2012, 6) while being dominated by the major economies: ‘over two-thirds of global spending stems from the US, China and Western Europe’. Addressing an audience of business travel professionals, the report also concludes that the direction of global business travel tends to be as uncertain as the world economy, directly threatened by vagaries such as the sovereign debt crisis.

In Germany, whose economy has proven to be able to resist the euro crisis and is leading the European growth, business travel activity seems to be particularly dynamic. The German Travel Management Association indicates that 8.8 million professionals from private companies or public institutions went on business trips in 2011, a 7.4% increase since 2010. The overall volume of German business trips increased by 5.9% compared to 2010, reaching 163.9 million in 2011. In Germany, 45 billion euros were spent on business trips in 2011, a 3.1% increase compared to 2010, while German business travellers spent an average of 148 euros per day (VDR 2013).

Holiday trips, for e.g., remained largely stable, and the VDR (Association of German Travel Management) registered a slight decline in sales to 51.1 billion euros in 2010 (cf. VDR 2010, 7). Travel statistics of this kind seismographically (though slightly belatedly) register positive as well as negative corporate expectations, and

thus indirectly provide information on economic moods. The studies by (Schneider 2009) show, however, that the normalization of mobility is a discursive phenomenon, a social construction of normality. The data presented do not initially assert an objective increase in mobility but an increase in the importance of mobility *experiences* in global economies. Mobility is becoming a social topic; people have to relate and are sensitized to it. According to these studies, the discourse on mobility is particularly well developed, especially in Germany. More Germans declare that they have own mobility experiences than other Europeans in the study (just under a fifth of the control sample). Section 3 will show that this process is furthered and that the corporate mobility regimes are discursively structured not only by the normalization of mobility but also by its rationalization and its time-space-compression.

## 2. The Sample

The hypotheses in this article were developed in a research project on behalf of the German foundation Hans-Böckler-Stiftung conducted between 2007 and 2010 (cf. Kesselring and Vogl 2010). Of the 68 interviews, 41 were with mobile workers, 10 with corporate experts and 17 with HR managers and members of works councils. The latter two were counted among the working interview partners; corporate experts were, for e.g., representatives of travel organizations, travel managers, specialized journalists and trade union experts in the area of mobile work.

Furthermore, the empiric research also included the analysis and systemization of business travel regulations, company agreements and labour contracts. Table 1 below shows the quintessential data sources.

All in all, eight companies were included in the study, their line of work ranging from mechanical engineering, traffic engineering, cooling systems, chemicals, payment systems, to IT and consulting. Apart from two exceptions, all of them were former small- and medium-sized enterprises that became global due to mergers and acquisitions. Accordingly, both international and national travel takes place in all reviewed companies.

The selection of the sample was led by theoretical considerations. On one hand, certain professions were previously classified as mobile and interview partners were specifically searched for. Those interviewees, however, sometimes referred to colleagues who recently had to take up travelling. Thus, new opportunities emerged to interview people who originally did not seem mobile. The qualitative data were analysed with regard to content; in doing so, the transcribed interviews were encoded by means of the software program MAXqda for qualitative data analysis.

**Table 1.** Data-set.

Analysis of secondary material	Evaluation of business travel regulations and employers/works council agreements, systemization of labour contracts and studies from various travel organizations
In-depth interviews	Interviews with highly mobile employees from eight Germany-based companies from different industries
Expert interviews	Interviews with corporate and external experts
Group discussion	Group discussion with members of works councils

### 3. Corporate Mobilities Regimes

Power relations for which ‘varied kinds of interdependencies’ (List 2007, 226) generate the necessity for regulations are determined as regimes. Regimes by definition deal with the problem of boundary management, the securing of inside and outside, and the social construction of cohesion. Political science thus marks the transition from relatively unambiguous forms of government to networked governance processes (Hajer and Wagenaar 2003). The goal of mobilities regimes in this sense is to exert dominance and control on all forms of mobilities and to regulate the movements of its members. Mobilities regimes have been discussed almost exclusively with regard to social mobilities. Career mobilities and the differentiations of hierarchical systems of recognition and reward are decisive factors of social change and therefore take centre stage. Research on social mobilities aims to recognize and analyse patterns of movement (or non-movement) between classes and social strata. Only recently has the sociological analysis of social structures begun to deal with spatial mobilities (cf. Mau and Mewes 2009). To determine the socially structuring dynamic of spatial mobilities, the concept of mobilities regimes was developed with reference to the political science concept of regimes. (Nohlen, Schultze, and Schüttemeyer 1998, 548) define a regime as ‘an institutionalized set of principles, norms, and rules that fundamentally governs the actors’ way of behaving in a given context’.

Therefore, corporate mobilities regimes are based on a specific set of principles, norms and rules that govern the mobility practice of its members within and on behalf of a company. They discipline mobile subjects by means of a framework for action that dictates who is allowed to move, how and under which terms. The three analytical levels of regimes refer to the different depths of invasion into an individual’s self-determination. Principles are the most general form, norms relatively concretely structure actions and rules give precise orientation and limitations. The imperative of mobilities, that is the fact that employees intend to establish the social and spatial mobility of a company, is considered the central principle of mobilities regimes. Therefore, mobility is a guiding principle for globally active companies because

the nature of the contemporary globalizing firm (...) provides the impetus and need for physical travel, especially if the corporate employee wishes to be an effective executive, manager or sales person. (Beaverstock et al. 2010b, 1)

Mobility norms have concrete demands on and relatively precise values for people’s behaviour. They define standards such as ‘national train journeys may only be undertaken in coach’ in such a way that they are accepted as obligatory guidelines. The compliance with norms is sanctioned individually and controlled socially. The goal is being able to calculate the behaviour of every member of a system. Ideally, norms are internalized to the extent that they are perceived as standards in their own right. Sanctions for violations of the norm in a corporate context range from social irritation and disdain to concrete warnings and even to dismissal in severe cases of non-observance.

By formulating rules, a mobilities regime’s norms are translated into concrete recorded instructions, detailed standards and bans. Thus, it is possible to give recognition and to positively or negatively sanction non-compliance with the rules. The

regulatory level of a mobilities regime encompasses the structuring and the control of the total corporate movements of employees. Concrete sets of rules of corporate mobilities regimes are the travel expense regulations and the business trip guidelines. They determine to which conditions and how trips are to be booked, how claims can be submitted, what happens if several employees are travelling together, if they can book single or double rooms or rental cars, which class they travel in, etc.

The corporate management of mobilities defines the formal framework of travelling. The resulting normality formats directly affect the utilization of transport, information and communication systems. If a hotel is near the place of action or in the city centre partly decides how employees can design their social and cultural contacts. The geographic location directly influences the quality of the mobility experience.

The internal social structuring of a mobilities regime corresponds with the external structuring of clients, competitors and cooperation partners. Mobilities regimes are socio-geographically configured domains of power. The physical presence of employees documents the company's claim to power even if it only provides services. Thus, the direct social interaction between attendants can be deconstructed as practice of power. (Foucault 1970) pointed out that practices of power most certainly do not find their most marked expression in the formalized programmes of modern institutions but that discursive practices are effectively crucial to the development of power. Following Foucault, the term governmentality will be used (Burchell and Foucault 2009), but there is a close connection between *talk* and *decision*, between societal communication on phenomena like mobility and how they are translated into actions. The corporate travel guideline represents the central corporate document that translates the discourse into actions and decisions. It is binding for travel service providers and employees are required to strictly base their mobilities decisions (bookings, choice of transport, journey times and comfort, etc.) on that guideline. Nonetheless, in an astonishingly large number of cases rules of distinction are applied and exceptions are made. First analyses on this topic found that individual solutions are applied in 30% of all regulations. There are, however, numerous indicators that employees identify with their companies to such an extent that they travel below the formalized standards – for example, if they do not exploit their claim to more comfort or use weekends to fly to a client to save costs for the project, the division and, thus, the company.

In short, this means that corporate mobilities regimes are constituted by discourses that are orientated towards the disciplining of the movements of individuals. These can be described on the basis of the dimensions of normalization, rationalization and time-space-compression.

### 3.1. Normalization

The most significant feature of the normalization of mobility in corporate routine is the increasing diffusion of mobile activities into stationary domains. Even employees who only a few years earlier travelled very little or not at all report that today business trips occur regularly. Until a few years ago, accountants and lab assistants belonged to the stationary personnel. Specialized workers as well did not usually travel. But during this research, these professional groups turned out to be almost ideal types for the definition of mobile work introduced above. This diffusion of mobile



work affects the corporate discourses: Previously, business trips were reasons for recognition and social distinction; today, however, they are just plain necessities.

This marks a change in the corporate discourse on mobilities. It is no longer a question of being allowed or able but rather of having to be mobile. Therefore, the positive correlation between social and geographic mobility is up for discussion as well, that is the idea that physical mobility brings change and benefit for the individual. The employees questioned predominantly doubted that complying with the mobilities requirements equalled professional advantages. Thus, the normalization also appears as a ‘disenchantment’ of the modern promise of mobility.

The social change appears by no means only in companies. It rather reacts to a general discursive shift in the societal structures of meaning that frame the social significance of mobility. The year 2006, for example, was the ‘European Year of Workers’ Mobility’. In the official leaflet, they not only say ‘mobility: good for the employees and good for the economy’; you can also read: ‘Europe’s future prosperity is dependent on the European workers’ ability to react and adapt to changes’. In other words: People who are geographically mobile also demonstrate mental and social mobility and open up individual and collective chances.<sup>3</sup>

### 3.2. *Rationalization*

The second dimension of mobilities regimes is reflected in the rationalization of corporate mobility management procedures and practices. Increasing travel leads to changes in cost awareness within companies. Currently, the pressure on companies to rationalize can often be seen in their attempts to drastically reduce their business trips. Travel becomes a topic of corporate controlling and one of the consequences is the lowering of travel standards. When business trips still were regarded as incentives, the costs were not a subject of discussion because they were seen as an investment into the employees’ motivation. Travelling expenses, however, cannot be reduced endlessly, even though the saving potential supposedly reaches up to 20% and the mean costs per trip have continuously been dropping since 2005.<sup>4</sup> Business trips are the third biggest cost factor in companies, but at the same time they are considered to be almost indispensable. As a result, internal conflicts of interest exist between a strategically motivated mobility policy and the saving of costs. Corporate controllers with their interest in minimizing travel costs are on one side; on the opposite side managers send their employees to meetings to present good figures. The social consequences of both strategic orientations are increasingly becoming a matter of discussion and reflection, as the data analysis shows. Among other things, this is documented by the fights that are being waged over the costs of corporate trips and that transform mobility into a political issue. As one of the results, major companies have continuously been revising their travel guidelines over the last years.

Exemplarily, one of these guidelines states that ‘the realization of standardized and transparent travel processes is a continued work in progress’. At the same time, however, this guideline also points out that even though a structural framework is being constructed, the realization is dependent on the employees’ cooperation, as

the individual traveller decides the success of the economical organization of a trip by specifically choosing means of travel and meeting the standards of the business trip regulations.

The rationalization of mobilities, however, includes the mobile subject itself. Mobility is subjectified and subjects need to rationalize themselves (Bröckling 2007b). Thus, employees take over management tasks; they control themselves and independently optimize their mobility. Therefore, companies are not the sole actors of rationalization; the employees have to take over the responsibility for the development and management of their own mobilities competences and they gradually become responsible for bringing their own limitations in accordance with the corporate goals. This is what (Bauman 2000; Beck, Bonß, and Lau 2003) characterize as the reflexive need for boundary management in order to retain the sustainability of work-life balance.<sup>5</sup> These subtle shifts of responsibility show that the corporate mobilities regime does not simply pass down its efforts to rationalize to the corporate level. Complex social and discursive prerequisites have to exist in order to exert control: The processes of rationalization initiated from the top down are actively supported by the employees because they are regarded as legitimate and ‘normal’. Only under this condition can regimes develop their guiding and regulating functions. Employees plan their business trips conscious of the cost involved and try to be productive even while travelling. They work en route; and so-called ‘miniaturized mobilities’ (Elliott and Urry 2010) allow converting airports, trains, hotels, clients’ offices, cafés and the personal car into ‘workspaces’. Employees are constantly reachable, not only everywhere and at any time but also spanning time zones.

Some authors define this as the mobilization of employees which means that the demand for spatial mobility is added to their temporal flexibility and that they travel in the service of their companies and forego their spare time and self-determination. Thus, mobilization can be interpreted as a new form of regime. Due to the employees’ mobility, direct control as an instrument of power fails and indirect and more abstract forms of dominance based on mobile workers controlling and navigating themselves come into effect.

### 3.3. *Time-space-compression*

The shrinking of distances due to faster means of transport is, according to (Harvey 1990), an essential characteristic of the global age. He recognizes a post-fordist order of space and time in the simultaneity of spatially distant events. ‘Time-space-compression’ is based on the overcoming of increasingly large distances in less time and leads to the expansion of economic activity spaces.

This development is accelerated by the use of ICTs by means of which information is sent round the globe in a matter of seconds. According to (Tomlinson 2003), this is the cause for a new social ‘immediacy’: Interaction with spatial absentees, conversations and the exchange of signs, documents and symbols become everyday parts of professional and living routines. In a world in which one uses WLAN, cell phones and Skype as ‘normal’ media, communication is possible 24/7. Constant accessibility enables permanent working, which is why employees themselves have to preserve their own personal and psychical boundaries and limits. ‘Natural’ – that is, externally defined – boundaries hardly exist anymore; and if they do, then mostly due to communication networks in deficit. Recovery phases have to be organized individually; networking technologies thus turn out as both a blessing and a curse because they generate not only advantages but also demands and stress.

The previously outlined ‘architecture’ of corporate mobilities regimes is based on the three discursive pillars of normalization, rationalization and time-space-compression. The question is how to sociologically evaluate this arrangement and what consequences it has for mobilities research.

#### 4. The Modern Mobilities Imperative

The works of French sociologists Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello led to a critical reception of mobility in the sociology of work. Their book *New Spirit of Capitalism* (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005) not only documents a boom of subjectified governance models in work regimes that regard the employees as actors of their own disciplining. It also describes a new mobilities imperative that demands increased social and spatial flexibility from the subjects:

The hero of the ‘connectionist world’ is the mobile, polyvalent, flexible networker (...) He constantly creates new projects, establishes networks, and lets others share in the profits of the net. (Wagner 2007, 7)<sup>6</sup>

Modern management concepts translate the principles of mobility, flexibility, subjectivity and constant motivation and willingness to adapt into the corporate acting of individuals. Boltanski and Chiapello base themselves on their own studies of management literature from the 1960s and 1990s. They compare the two survey periods and conclude that in modern companies, the chances for success increase if the employees stage their own individuality, subjectivity and flexibility together with an extensive willingness to be mobile. To signal ‘Grandeur’, the legitimate claim to success, these characteristics have to be displayed as elements of the self. In the end, they thus describe a spatially as well as socially flexible human being who corresponds with the ideal of ‘flexible capitalism’ (Sennett 1998). Everybody who eliminates what bars the way to the free availability of workforce can be successful. In the 1990s, attachments to certain places were regarded as just as counterproductive as long-term emotional relationships because ‘the apologia for change, risk and mobility replaces the high premium put on the idea of security’ (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005, 89).

Who wants to be successful has to be mobile and prepared to take risks and to be able to prove their ability to be project-oriented and network by themselves. The inherent mobilities competence becomes the decisive factor. He/she who can demonstrate that can control the conditions of their own (mobile) work at the same time assert their claim to a share in the success. In the new work regimes, success is measured by the numbers of activities, contacts and options that in turn generate new projects.

But the successful pay a high social price. Both work and life become a series of temporary projects in which long-term life planning and stable relationships matter little. The imperative to be unattached requires first and foremost doing without stability and rootedness, without attachment to a place and the security of long-term contacts.

The question arises if human beings can be socialized into an extensive mobilities regime to the same extent as at the time of the emergence of Capitalism when they had to get used to a de-personalized, rigid working-hours regime. Can contemporary sociologic investigations on the detachment from place and its social references (cf.

Augé 1995; Bauman 2000) be interpreted in such a way that they witness the rise of new societal mobilities competences? (Urry 2000) talks about ‘dwelling in mobility’ and describes how people can be socially integrated and native to a place even though they are constantly in transit. (Beck 2006) considers ‘roots with wings’ for modern individuals in order to be socially integrated in the mobile risk society. Taking the above analyses of corporate mobilities regimes as starting point, there are indications that ‘the valuing of fixity, permanence, and location (...) gives way to the valuing of mobility, flexibility, and openness to change’ (Tomlinson 2003, 75).

But dystopian analyses in which the increasing physical mobility is regarded as a massive danger to the social and ecological foundations of modernity (Sennett 1998; Urry 2013) seem plausible as well. The ambivalence in the relationship of the modern society towards movement and flexibility is the crucial starting point for the comprehensive theoretical understanding of the phenomenon of mobilization. This applies to the ecological consequences of increasing mobility as well as to the impact on social cohesion and integration. The phenomenon of simultaneity can illustrate how ambiguity by mobility infiltrates basal social connections. (Harvey 1990, 201ff) characterizes simultaneity as the central momentum of the historic change in the spatiotemporal regimes of modernity. It develops if communication technologies breach the exclusivity of spaces. One can be in different geographic, social, cultural and virtual spaces at the same time if one has access to the required technical equipment. These technical immediacies lose their aura of particularity; for mobile workers especially they have become quite normal. The included loss of meaning of the physical space is a fundamental element of the cosmopolitanization of daily routine closely linked to the blurring of socio-geographic boundaries within work processes. The fact that spatial distance plays a less important role than 10 or 20 years ago is, however, not only a social one; specifically, these processes of immediacy connect social processes of deterritorialization with spatial mobilization. It may sound paradox, but mechanical and virtual, communicative and media-based mobilities happen simultaneously and at the same place – and yet in different spaces.

[T]his sort of speed is categorically different from immediacy. Mechanical velocity is still with us in abundance; indeed, the Night Mail still runs. Just as globalization has not literally shrunk the world, so distance and the physical effort to overcome it still stubbornly persist. But now we have something else. Now we have the phenomenon of immediacy, which, in its light, effortless, easy ubiquity, has more or less displaced both the laborious and the heroic cultural attachments of an earlier speed. And with this displacement comes a shift in cultural assumptions, expectations, attitudes and values. (Tomlinson 2003, 57)

Elliott and Urry (2010) analyse the double ambivalence that develops if the interacting parties are moving at the same time. They regard the everyday micro technological movement patterns as nuclei of new digitalized life styles: Traffic and communication technologies merge; everyday social practices develop in which spatial mobility is not only necessary but also an expression of individuality. Although this staging of mobility as practice of distinction has been known for a long time, new studies show that it is no longer the car that primarily symbolizes the status and mobility of its user but mobile devices such as smartphones or mp3 players. They become new artefacts for conspicuous consumption within the mobile society (cf. Katz and Aakhus 2002; Ling 2005).

The circulation of large quantities of mobile devices reveals a structural change which can be analysed on four levels:

1. Mobile technologies are omnipresent (smartphones, digitalized displays in the subway, information on demand, laptops and communication media, invisible intelligent transport systems, freely bookable bicycles, new car sharing systems, Swiss mobility cards, etc.). Thus, 'strategic travel planning and communications scheduling' become relevant for an increasing number of people from different social strata and age groups. Provided that 'advanced mobilities' (Elliott and Urry 2010, 32) are not only technically possible but also affordable, the planning of communications and meetings in person increases. Waiting becomes 'equipped waiting' (Lyons, Jain, and Holley 2007) during which people are not only highly productive but can also experience 'spare times' as emotionally essential (cf. Ehn and Löfgren 2010). Mobile workers use waiting periods as phases for reflection or for telephone calls.<sup>7</sup>
2. Mobilities technologies facilitate social connectivity. Single human beings become a sort of 'portal' as they gain technological access to social spaces. 'On the move', parallel worlds can merge. Complex combinations of senses, codices and different regimes happen. One can, e.g., drive a car and take part in a meeting; at the same time, one receives data that enable one to get one's bearings or that offers the latest information on the stock market, culture or politics. Activities and social relationships are *delocalized* and *decontextualized*. Navigation means more than just manoeuvring through a topology; it also means the ability to decide which information and which sociality are relevant at a given moment. Urban space or Facebook? Road or virtual space? Landline telephones are attached to certain places; mobile phones on the other hand enable autonomous movement. Communication does not happen between places but between people. Mobile sociality is different from stationary sociality which is why (Kaufmann 2002) discusses different models of collectivization; from the aerolar model of local rootedness to the rhizomatically fluid model of collectivization in mobile social environments.
3. Current studies show that relationships are based on distance and with great spatial mobility on 'multiple processes of coordination, negotiation and renegotiation with others' (Elliott and Urry 2010, 31). As distances increase, coordination efforts grow as well (cf. Katz and Aakhus 2002; Ling 2005; Axtell, Hislop, and Whittaker 2008; Forlano 2008). Families that meet daily can trust in routines, traditions and clear agreements. This does not apply if one or more persons are frequently away on business. The daily routine of teenagers is increasingly formed by mobility. Familial life is especially in cities characterized by increasing social dislimitations and asynchronicities which leads to increased coordination efforts in the middle classes in order to gather the family members. Social relationships are not anymore constituted only by face-to-face communications; rather, in order to establish cohesion technological forms of coordination and interaction have to be used and practised.
4. Those shifts in the social constructions of reality have consequences on the socio-psychological foundation of relationships and on the structure of

people's everyday interactions. They affect fundamental societal categories such as presence and absence, here and there, availability and social closeness. (Elliot and Urry 2010) extensively discuss the social consequences of a technological unconscious that pre-structures social bonds. This can also be interpreted as hybridization of the social which means that social relationships and interactions are increasingly dependent on technological networks that often operate invisibly in the background.

The structure of mobility that emerges from the developments implied in this paper can be characterized as 'non-directional' (Kesselring 2008b). In the industrial modern age, mobility was conceptualized in unambiguous social and spatial classification categories such as origin and destination. Subjects were seen as entities on their way from an origin to a destination; in the reflexive modern age, however, the ambivalences of mobility become an everyday societal problem (see Freudendal-Pedersen 2009). Practically, this is shown whenever one does not make an appointment at an unambiguously determined place and a precisely defined time but vague like 'in the city' or 'in the neighbourhood'; and the specific coordination and 'geolocalisation' (Licoppe et al. 2008) take place on the way via mobile phone.

The emerging socio-geographical movement patterns can be specified as 'reticular', network-like. Highly mobile people such as mobile workers develop these reticular patterns, the mobilities of which are by no means undirected, that is chaotic, aimless or anomic, but follow a connective logic of integration into meaningful contexts and social bonds and interactions.

Regarding the daily spatial organization, reticular mobilities differ significantly from a spatially and socially centred structuration of mobility in which social cohesion is generated from physical presence. Superficially, this entails an increase in the complexity of trip chains. Unidirectional routes are no longer the pattern dictating people's organization in space but apparently spontaneously changing, even meandering patterns that can be reconstructed by GPS technology; for e.g., Licoppe regards this as a 'new repertoire for managing social relations in a changing communication technoscape' (Licoppe 2004, 135). He calls the new social phenomenon 'connected presence'. The Senseable City Lab at the MIT at Harvard (senseable.mit.edu) conducts GPS measurements that reveal apparently chaotic movement patterns. If one follows individual mobile persons in urban centres, the expected focused movements do not emerge. In fact, the movement patterns change situationally due to communicative incidents such as telephone calls or texts. Licoppe also shows how teenagers' so-called 'text-relays' manifest spatially and how situational spatial configurations can be explained on the basis of the inner structuring of social networks (Licoppe et al. 2008). These diagnoses align with the youth sociological studies by (Tully 2002) regarding the connection of mobility with the usage of new technologies.

## 5. Disciplined Mobilities

By means of the concept of the reticular structuring of mobility, some specifics of mobile work and corporate mobilities regimes can be worked out. The definition of mobile work introduced above deliberately avoids a confinement to mobile telework. Highly mobile plant engineering operators, for e.g., are more likely to carry a tool

bag than light IT baggage. Due to this, the EU project Statistical Indicators Benchmarking the Information Society (SIBIS) defines mobile workers as those

who spend some paid working time away from their home and away from their main place of work, e.g. on business trips, in the field, travelling or on customers' premises at least once per month. High-intensity mobile workers are those who do so for 10 h or more per week. (Gareis, Lilischkis, and Mentrup 2006, 55)

The SIBIS database<sup>8</sup> shows that already in 2002, almost 30% of all workers in the 15 EU countries were mobile; more than half, 15% to be precise, were highly mobile and travelled considerably more than the required ten hours per week. Available estimations assume that in the near future, up to a billion mobile jobs will exist worldwide. According to a special analysis of the already mentioned German 'DGB-Index Gute Arbeit', a total of about 20% of the employed are mobile workers although there are great differences between industry sectors (cf. Roth 2010, 118).

Generally speaking, mobile workers move in horizontally structured technological nets that are connected to virtual and social networks. Highly complex technological environments shape the working environments and at the same time spaces of opportunities and connectivities. The 'App culture', smartphone device developed by Apple and others, forces the structural change of the organization of mobility and transport. The discussion on transversal and reticular mobilities once again shows the ambivalence of mobility. Therefore, it is no coincidence that the fields of conflict between autonomy and dependence, freedom and the lack thereof, etc. are the centre of mobility analyses.<sup>9</sup> The disciplinary power of a specific mobilities regime can be best studied from the reactions and reflections of mobile subjects moving within these regimes. The mobile subjects' discursive activities provide information on the moments at which demands on their mobilities competence become excessive and stressful.

The capitalist control regime (and the companies in particular) appears as a total regime if one at this point considers the papers of Foucault and Hardt & Negri. The relationships between freedom and the lack thereof, control and self-determination seemingly are to the disadvantage of the mobile subjects. Apparently, only controlled movements can take place within a disciplinary regime; the subjects cannot escape the systemic disciplinary power, not even if they are spatially removed from the power centre. In disciplinary regimes,

the entire society, with all its productive and reproductive articulations, is subsumed under the command of capital and the state, and (...) the society tends, gradually but with unstoppable continuity, to be ruled solely by criteria of capitalist production. (Hardt and Negri 2000, 243)

A disciplinary society is, according to Hardt and Hegri, a 'factory society'. In this sense, the authors of 'Empire' refer to the theories of subjectification. They aim to explain how people decide and act during work processes and in what way self-control and self-discipline are expressions of individual or rather of systemic rationality. Concepts like the 'entrepreneurial self' (Bröckling 2007a) or the 'entrepreneurs of the own work-force' (Voß and Pongratz 1998) define the subject as forced to present

itself as an individual and yet to embrace the capitalist logic of self-marketing at the same time. According to this logic,

there are no more resistant subjects: The actors have internalized the demand of the capitalist society to such an extent that they want to be successful ‘entrepreneurs of the own work-force’ and good citizens of their own free will. (Rosa, Strecker, and Kottmann 2007, 264)<sup>10</sup>

Thus, the capitalist disciplinary regime appears as global meta-structure. Everywhere one travels, the disciplinary regime is already established and one cannot leave its control room. This is the theoretic figure with which mobility is analysed in Foucaultian tradition and where mobility research is closely linked to the ‘surveillance studies’. The airport is paradigmatically seen as icon of the global control room (cf. Fuller and Harley 2005; Salter 2008). The disciplinary regime, however, has a material structure which shows not only in the fluid domination practices that regulate people’s mentalities, abilities and rationalities. It manifests in the flows of the world society consisting of capital, knowledge and the physical mobilities of migrants, business travellers, tourists, etc. who frequent airports, trains and motorway restaurants (Ritzer 2010).

Mobile work is not only disciplined by the companies. Travel takes place in extremely structured environments in which norms and regulations operate that are imposed and controlled by others. Political and societal pre-structuring is an important factor in the creation of spatial mobility. The subject has almost no influence on the forming of these environments. Delays at an airport’s security check, for example, can cause stress for mobile workers that cannot be influenced. Therefore, corporate mobilities regimes have to be coordinated with the surrounding mobilities regimes (starting with the road traffic regulations, to the mentioned modalities at the airport, to the passport and border regimes that regulate the conditions of entry). Often, conflicts arise that have to be managed by the employees themselves.<sup>11</sup>

The general question is whether the concept of a globally disciplining mobility regime is empirically sound. This question has already been researched during a survey on mobile workers and their experiences with business trips (Kesselring and Vogl 2010). The centre of the survey was not the general validity of disciplining theories but rather the question if the structural ambivalence of mobility enables the mobile subjects to defy the totality of the disciplinary regime. The matter of autonomy and heteronomy becomes immediately relevant in mobility research because mobile workers, for e.g., constantly are in situations in which they can manoeuvre and interpret almost freely. How the field of conflict between the company’s claim to control and the openness and individual freedom during trips can be qualified has earlier been presented in the central dimensions of corporate mobility regimes.

## 6. Perspectives of Mobility Research

The relationships of modern societies and spatial mobility are to a large extent characterized by ambivalences. This is illustrated in a particular way by a quote from an apparently far off topic; it originates from one of the central documents of contemporary British history of mobility and transport, the so-called Buchanan Report dating from 1963. It effectively formulates a planning strategy against the negative consequences of traffic in urban spaces. It says:



We are nourishing at immense cost a monster of great potential destructiveness. And yet we love him dearly. Regarded in its collective aspect as the ‘traffic problem’ the motor car is clearly a menace which can spoil our civilization. But translated into terms of the particular vehicle that stands in our garage (...), we regard it as one of our most treasured possessions or dearest ambitions, an immense convenience, an expander of the dimension of life, an instrument of emancipation, a symbol of the modern age. (Buchanan 1964; foreword)

The ambivalence described here similarly defines the corporate mobility discourse. On one hand, mobility is hailed as opportunity for the development of corporate and individual potentials. On the other hand, the breaking point seems to have been reached. The social costs of corporate mobility regimes become apparent and not only demand a corporate reaction but also engender increased research. The following quote from an interview with a metal worker illustrates that cumulative effects with other processes of the subjectification of work occur and that constant mobility adds to that ‘on top’:

I’d say I’ve reached a point at which I’d basically say that I have to put on the brakes. Not only as far as travel is concerned but also at work generally. It’s just that working 24/7 doesn’t work out, it’s just not doable. (Cf. Kesselring and Vogl 2010, 142)<sup>12</sup>

The question is, among other things, how subjects develop their mobility competences in order to organize socially sustainable travel. As they travel, they develop a specific ‘network capital’ (Larsen, Urry, and Axhausen 2006a) which they can employ in other contexts in order to reach goals, realize projects and increase their market value. Mobile workers constantly move in, through and with networks. They use material and physical transportation infrastructures, communicate via technological networks and travel with their networks as they take their professional and social contacts with them during trips. In a recent work (Kesselring 2008a), I introduced ‘reticular mobility management’ as an ideal type. Based on media freelancers, Vogl (2008) empirically confirmed and differentiated this type. Virtual and physical mobility practices, that is the usage of the web and the physical movement in space, connect in such a way that subject-specific mobility spaces develop in which individuals can realize different mobility purposes. Kaufmann (2002, 2011) uses motility in order to emphasize the social inequalities of a social construction of mobility. He shows that people appropriate spatial structures and technologies to overcome spaces individually and that they have different accesses to spaces and technologies at their disposal because their cultural, social and economical capitals differ. He also shows that people have different competences and, therefore, differentiate in their own possibilities to manage societal (and corporate) mobility demands. Against this backdrop, the occupational normalization of mobility research becomes strategically relevant because currently there are no corporate and societal concepts on the social sustainability of mobility.

Ultimately, the rigidity of a mobility regime decides whether mobile workers wear their subjective abilities out or if they determine the goal of their trip in such a way that new perspectives arise and private, cultural and educational aspects play a role. Employees describe their travels as subjective gain or as costs, dependent on the degree of rationalization and the compression of their mobility. Accordingly, the

organization of mobility and the concrete shaping of corporate mobilities regimes are a political issue that should not be solely determined by the logic of cost savings.

Mobilities are fundamental elements of the social constitution of firm structures. The current normalization of mobility represents a clear sociocultural change in the working sphere. If some of the quoted prognoses turn out to be true, the social structures in companies will change significantly in the medium and long term. Currently, mobile workers are still perceived as exceptions. If the trend towards a mobilization of work remains stable, the social relations between mobile and stationary employees will be reconfigured. Corporate governance approaches will have to be developed that react to the mobilization of social structures.

The correlations between mobility, power and discipline, the issue of social cohesion and integration should be sorted out in a phase of social change in which the overcoming of distances and the maintenance of relationships and communication increasingly decides on the sustainability of cultures and lifestyles. The issue of the security and stability of social systems, the future of work, the durability of interaction, identity and belonging are also decided by the social construction of mobility, movement and flexibility, and the relations of 'movement and inertia' (Rosa 2003). Against this backdrop, topics neglected until now such as the correlations of social and geographical mobility gain societal and political brisance. Benno Werlen's work on the analysis of social spaces and the links between society, action and space (Werlen 1993) can, like Torsten Hägerstrand's concepts on time geography, be used as concepts bridging between disciplines. The dynamic with which sociology, as part of the globalization discourse, takes on the question of space is promising. Accordingly, the boom of mobility studies during the last two decades can be explained as a retroactive theorization of dealing with distances. It represents an adjustment and a re-foundation of a sociology that regards interaction as dynamic and mobile phenomenon. Accordingly, individuals, subjects and members of the society are 'moving targets'. 'Mobile methods' (Büscher, Urry, and Witchger 2010) are a logic consequence of the theory-oriented momentum of the 'new mobilities paradigm' and at the same time raise the issue of new perspectives in empiric social research. By using, for example, GPS technology in order to learn when, how and where people move, one can also learn the essentials of the social structuring of mobile societies. If the quantitative research on the measuring of routes is complemented by qualitative data on the purposes and motives of taking certain routes, substantial statements can be made on the power of attachment and integration that are conditional upon increasing mobility demands. Such research aims to understand what the structural change means to the conditions of *vergemeinschaftung* and *vergesellschaftung*. To this end, the descriptive approaches that render mobility visible, comprehensible and, ideally, predictable have to be combined with hermeneutic interpretation and reconstruction. 'Mobility as a brute fact' (Cresswell) in the tradition of quantitative modelling, transportation and migration research, and transport planning is recorded in order to measure spatial movements. 'Ideas about mobility that are conveyed through a diverse array of representational strategies' (Cresswell 2006, 3) based on interviews, document analyses, ethnographic studies, secondary analyses of existing data, film analyses or the interpretation of literary materials have to be identified in order to establish a sociologically substantial research programme, not only on corporate mobilities regimes. This is a promising strategy to make a statement on the societal meaning of mobility and on the shifts in the meaningful structures of mobilities

regimes that not only structure companies and the contained actors but that are generally influential.

### Acknowledgement

This article is based on two research projects funded by the Hans Böckler Foundation (Hans Böckler Stiftung). I thank the foundation for supporting ‘Corporate Mobilities Regimes’ from 2007 to 2009 and the ongoing project ‘Mobility all around the work: on mobility capital and social inequality’. This research was conducted with Gerlinde Vogl, and with Katrin Roller from 2012.

### Notes

1. German original translated by the author.
2. ECaTT stands for Electronic Commerce and Telework Trends and stems from the final report of an EU project that addressed new working methods and the potentials of e-commerce (<http://www.ecatt.com/>). Therefore, this widely spread definition emphasizes the aspect of online data transfer and sees mobile workers as ‘those who work at least 10 h per week away from home and from their main place of work, e.g. on business trips, in the field, travelling or on customers’ premises, and use online computer connections when doing so’ (Pearn Kandola 2007, 6).
3. See [http://europa.eu/legislation\\_summaries/internal\\_market/living\\_and\\_working\\_in\\_the\\_internal\\_market/c11333\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/legislation_summaries/internal_market/living_and_working_in_the_internal_market/c11333_en.htm) (last checked on February 03, 2013).
4. Between 2005 and 2009, the mean costs per business trip dropped from 335 to 312 euros in Germany (VDR 2010, 6).
5. These aspects play an important role in the debate on the blurring of boundaries and the development of competences to manage the requirements and burdens of private and professional life. See the recent publications by Huchler (2013) and Kesselring and Vogl (2010) on mobility competences and the social costs of corporate mobility.
6. German original translated by the author.
7. Already in 1993, Ulrich Beck described the traffic jam as the form of meditation of the reflexive modern age. Eric Laurier’s papers impressively document that car rides can be moments of highest intimacy and emotional closeness. Traffic jams are often used to discuss problematic topics, also because the intensity can be broken at any time to concentrate on traffic. At the 6th Cosmobilities Conference in Aalborg (Denmark), Laurier presented a hermeneutic analysis of video-documented drives. The conversations ‘on the move’ show an emotional density which in his opinion is due to the special transitoriness of the drive. Cf. also the discussion on ‘mobile methods’ and Laurier’s further papers (Laurier 2005; Büscher, Urry, and Witchger 2010).
8. The data basis is population surveys from the years 2002 and 2003 carried out in EU member states ([www.sibis-eu.org](http://www.sibis-eu.org)).
9. Ambivalence plays a prominent role in mobilities research. In literature as well as in music, arts and philosophy, the fields of conflict between the modern promise of freedom due to mobility and the constraints, or rather the limits, of mobility are discussed extensively (cf. Leed 1991; Bauman 2000; Cresswell 2006; Kesselring and Vogl 2008). The empirical surveys of the ‘structural stories approach’ (Freudental-Pedersen 2009) show that the ambiguous relationship between modernity and mobility is mirrored in the everyday practices of individuals and is central to policies and the understanding of mobility actions.
10. German original translated by the author.
11. The volcanic eruption in Iceland, for example, showed how the failure of mobility can become a global endurance test. Cf. the special issue volume 6, no. 1 of the magazine *Mobilities* (Birchneil and Büscher 2011).
12. German original translated by the author.

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